

LGBT+ A more Inclusive Self Organised Group

It is great after 18 months of campaigning to finally be an inclusive LGBT+ Self Organised Group, something we would not have achieved without the support of so many branches, regions and members.

As many of you know the National Committee undertook a consultation in 2018 on making our SOG fully inclusive following a motion from the National Young Members Forum highlighting the growing number of people, and young people in particular, identifying their sexual orientation and gender identity in many different ways beyond a binary definition, and expressing their preference to see the LGBT group move to organise on an LGBT+ (plus) basis. 78% of members who responded to our consultation were in favour of adding '+' to our name, as were all of the regions.

Motions were submitted to, debated at and overwhelmingly carried at the last year's LGBT conference. Following that, the National Committee worked hard to develop our campaign to seek the rule amendment at National Delegate Conference earlier this year.

We would like thank the many activists who delivered our 'Support the Plus' PowerPoint presentation, submitted and moved motions at branch and regional levels, spoke to members, leafleted at conference and the many donations received from branches and regions to produce campaign materials.

Continued on page 2



Continued from page 1

It was truly incredible to speak to so many delegates at the Service Group Conferences immediately before and at NDC, who repeatedly said they had discussed, debated and fully supported our campaign and rule change. This was ultimately demonstrated with a unanimous vote in favour to add the 'plus'. Therefore future proofing our union and our group as language and the way people define themselves are constantly evolving and for growing our young membership, particularly pertinent in the year of the young worker.

Now the work begins, over the course of the next twelve months we will be updating our materials, forms, factsheets, website, social media and much more - to show we are now inclusive of the plus.

Once again we need your help. If you hold a branch or regional position, please spread the word that we are now UNISON's LGBT+ Self Organised Group. Please check all of the materials you use and seek to have anything which refers to our SOG updated. We are not suggesting that people recycle any of our existing materials, simply once they have been used up or need replacing that these are updated to include the plus.

If you identify any national materials which need updating please do let us know. We will work tirelessly to update our language. More than that, we will continue our work to be inclusive of our members who identify as part of the plus. This includes working with members to share their experiences and to provide education on the discrimination they face.

Once again thank you all for your support!

My UNISON Activism

by Hassan Ortega

Out in UNISON caught up with Hassan Ortega from the North West region who has been an active UNISON member for a number of years. We asked him a few questions about his 'journey' within the union.



What does your activism in UNISON entail?

Well, I am a workplace rep, branch officer, member of North West Regional Committee, Regional Council, Regional Organising Committee, Regional Community Service Group Executive, the Community Service Group Executive and the National (Disciplinary) Appeals Committee. So that's a lot of reading and writing reports for meetings, motion writing, speaking and planning - and frequently a lot of lying down afterwards!

I also work for a charity delivering Salford Council's Homelessness Prevention contract, which means that I am a Community Service Group member in a local government branch. I get to see every day the devastating effect that the government's austerity measures have on individual lives.

So how does LGBT+ Self Organisation figure in all that?

Well, in my case, it's integral to everything I do. I'm a gay man and a trade unionist. In 1993 when UNISON was formed, lesbian & gay self organisation was one of the founding principles and enshrined in our constitution. Although I missed the very first national conference, I got involved very early on and, to be honest, if I hadn't, I don't think I would be as involved in the union as I am today.

Really? Can you elaborate?

In those early days, there was a great deal of work to do to ensure that L&G issues were taken notice of and, more importantly, became integral to UNISON's overall bargaining agenda. Learning how to articulate these issues and to negotiate within the union structures on how they should be taken forward and acted upon was key for me. I was already a steward and branch officer when I got involved and that was good training but (as it was then) Lesbian & Gay Self Organisation helped me to improve these skills and get a much wider perspective of where and how our issues fitted into UNISON'S work. Remember, this was the period just after Section 28 and before changes to the Age of Consent and Civil Partnerships – we had a very full campaigning agenda and one where UNISON played a pivotal role.

What LGBT+ self organisation has taught me (through many conferences, meetings and heated debates) is how to adopt a strategic approach to my work, how to articulate my views in word and speech and, ultimately, what can be achieved through a collaborative approach – with allies within and outside the union. I know that all sounds very ‘worthy’ but it is definitely true. The diversity of our membership and how it is represented in UNISON (and particularly LGBT+ self organisation) is one of our strengths. At a very local level - and through our decision-making structures - it forces you to acknowledge the validity of other’s views, respect them and try to find a workable solution to move forward to achieve common goals.

So, you supported the LGBT ‘plus’ then?

Exactly my point. The move to improve on our existing inclusivity demonstrates clearly how we do things in LGBT+ self organisation. It shows we have moved on and are moving forward. That’s a lot of ‘movement’ for some people to get their heads around but we have to reflect what’s going on in wider society and evolve accordingly. Pity the same can’t be said about other areas of the trade union movement!

That sounds controversial. Do you want to elaborate?

Well, it’s not really. The call for the ‘plus’ came from Young Members and UNISON responded. A high proportion of trade union members in the UK are (like me) aged over 50. The trade union movement has to make our work relevant to younger people. You can only do this by including them in the decision-making process and ensure that our bargaining agenda reflects those views.

Check your pension if you have a same sex partner

by Stuart Etheridge

In January 2019 I made enquiries about taking my pension with Thames Water. After receiving details of my entitlement, I was a little puzzled when it stated that: “If you are in a same-sex marriage or civil partnership a Spouse pension is still payable, but not all of your pensionable service is used to calculate it.”

Having listened to debates at UNISON’s LGBT conferences, I was aware of the Supreme Court ruling made on the 12 July 2017 in the case of *Walker v Innospec*; which determined that survivors’ benefits should be the same for same-sex couples (whether married or in civil partnerships) as those for opposite-sex married couples.

After questioning this with the administrators at the time, Capita, and waiting many weeks for an answer, I finally received an apology and was assured that the matter would be rectified. Several weeks later, I received further information with the same error involving same-sex partners. This made me wonder whether people had lost out on their full entitlement and I voiced further concerns. Since then, the administrators have been transferred to Trafalgar House who responded:

“We have been assured that the trustees are currently conducting an exercise to assess anyone who may be impacted by the issue you have brought to light and benefits will be adjusted accordingly if necessary.”

In light of my experience, it seems not all pension administrators have been quick to respond to the change in law and therefore I would urge anyone who could be affected to check their entitlements.

Snippets

UNISON was very proud to be at the first ever BiPride earlier this year – where we had a stall which gave us the opportunity to promote why UNISON is the union for bi people who provide public services.

The 2018 LGBT conference passed a motion on the report by the United Nations (UN) in August 2017, condemning the United Kingdom’s Government’s failure to uphold disabled people’s rights. Following this our disabled members caucus together with our campaigning sub-committee have prepared a model letter that can be sent to your local MP, asking them to commit to working to ensure the government fully implements the UN’s recommendations and address the failings under the UN’s Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. If you would like a copy of this letter please contact Out@unison.co.uk.

My UNISON activism

by Jennifer Black

My journey into trade union activism has been quite a long one.

I have always been a union member but did not become an activist until the spring of 2013, shortly after I came out to family, friends and work as Trans



Prior to that I had been a UNISON member and on a number of occasions had been asked to be a steward, however as I was also a senior

manager within my service area I felt unable to do this because of a conflict of interests. That said, it never stopped me standing on picket lines during strike action or thrusting recruitment forms into the hands of new staff I had just appointed.

My transition gave me the unexpected opportunity to change my union involvement. I went along to what was then the region's LGBT Self Organised Group. This was a form of activism I could be engaged with that didn't bring me into conflict with members or my employer. The first couple of meetings I attended gave me the confidence to become my branch equality officer. I was now able to put my knowledge of how my employer worked to good use. I started working with them, and using UNISON's guidance notes helped shape and develop equality practices for those with protected characteristics and generally raising the profile of equality issues. I went to my first ever (National LGBT) conference that November and had

my eyes opened to the range of issues that we campaigned on and the sheer energy and commitment of the other delegates.

This fairly low level activism didn't last long as I was soon branch chair on full time paid release from my employer. I quickly became an accredited steward and began representing people, quite often challenging cases being put forward by former management colleagues. My knowledge of management, their processes and interpretation of council policies gave me a couple of quick wins which boosted my confidence, and left me, and the members, feeling happy.

After a couple of years of learning about UNISON and how we organise and operate I built the confidence to stand to become co-chair of the regional LGBT+ SOG. A natural progression from this, two years later, was to stand for the reps seat on the National LGBT+ committee. For me this was a major step forward in my trade union development. Being part of this committee, working with so many vastly experienced and knowledgeable colleagues and officers has helped me develop in so many different ways. At my very first meeting I was encouraged to be part of one of the committee's sub groups, I was firmly (but supportively told) "you're here to be part of the work, not to sit and watch so get involved".

My UNISON activist journey doesn't end here. Being on the National LGBT+ committee was a real eye opener in respect of understanding how our union works at a national level. Being part of a team that is able to influence and implement change for the benefit of our members is incredibly rewarding and this has inspired me to spread my interests a bit further.

In 2018 I became one of my region's reps to the local government service group executive. To my knowledge I am the only 'Out' LGBT+ person on the executive. My presence gives me the opportunity to speak up when LGBT+ issues are on the agenda (or not as the case may be)! I feel this crossover into service specific areas of UNISON is important. It shows the rest of UNISON that we have a contribution to make on wider trades union matters.

I have no doubt that without the experience I have gained from being part of UNISON's LGBT+ SOG structures and the opportunities and support given to me by national committee members I would never have considered putting myself forward for a role on the local government SGE.

So, where next?

Pension Win

Frances Shiels, UNISON retired member, took action when the Pension

Service said they would only pay her state pension from the date she received her gender recognition certificate (GRC) rather than the age of entitlement. With support from the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, they were able to argue her case and agree a full settlement.

Frances said: "It is important that the rights of transgender individuals are properly respected and that we can fully participate in society like everyone else. I knew from the outset that I was not being treated fairly but was only able to establish my rights when I received help from the Human Rights Commission."

Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK where transgender people need to be unmarried before they can apply for a GRC. This meant that Frances could not apply for pension at the same time as other women of her age.

Her Gender Recognition Certificate from the Gender Identity Panel was granted in February 2015 and she then applied for her state pension in April 2015.

Chief Commissioner Les Allamby from the NI Human Rights commission added: "We are delighted with the settlement for Frances, we argued that the initial decision of the Pensions Service was discriminatory under the Human Rights Act and caused her a significant financial loss, we are happy this has now been fixed".



UKBlack Pride – a family affair

by Natalie Forbes Smalley

This year I was able to share the experience of representing UNISON in London Pride and UK Black pride with my 15 year old Son Nathaniel. Nathaniel has joined me on many rallies and parades, but this was his first time marching in London Pride and attending UK Black pride. The atmosphere at both prides was amazing and Nathaniel beamed from ear to ear constantly for the two days. I was so proud to see my young man march with such pride, holding our banner with his head held high.

UK Black pride is such an important event for me culturally as a Black lesbian. To be able to share this event with my son was emotional but awesome. Nathaniel thoroughly enjoyed it, and I could see he got the same gratification in his heart that I get at this event.

He helped out on the UNISON stall, and I was able to share some of the work I do on the national LGBT+ committee with him, as I was one of the panel members on a debate session on the values of being in a trade union (although his presence made me more nervous than I have ever been before).

Nathaniel would like to thank UNISON for giving him the opportunity to represent hand in hand with his mother at these two events, which have such important and special meaning to us both.



Why are we missing?

The lay members guide to why we don't have reserved seats on the NEC

Our LGBT+ Conference comes round but once a year, and so it seems does this question.

So why aren't we there? And, more importantly, why don't we want to be?

UNISON's NEC is the most senior elected body in our union and it represents us all. It's made up from regional and service groups reps, with guaranteed numbers of women and low paid members, plus seats reserved for Black, disabled and young members. We are all part of a region and a service group and have a vote on who sits on the NEC.

Every year feels a bit like Groundhog Day when we seem to get asked: why are there no reserved seats for LGBT+ members?

The LGBT+ self-organised group has discussed this, at national committee and at conference, and overwhelmingly concluded it's not an avenue we believe is beneficial to our members. We work on your behalf to increase LGBT+ involvement and visibility across the union, and we believe that the voice of LGBT+ members is the voice of the LGBT+ self-organised group itself.

Having reserved LGBT+ seats on the NEC does not mean that our voice gets heard, in fact it places it at risk, and this is why:

NEC members are elected by the general membership. UNISON membership data cannot yet differentiate all LGBT+ members. Monitoring information is only

slowly building. So reserved seats for LGBT+ members would be elected by the whole membership – meaning they would be elected mainly by members who are not LGBT+ themselves.

As they would not be directly voted for by only LGBT+ members, NEC members elected to these reserved seats would not be accountable to our self-organised group, and may indeed even hold different views to our self-organised group. This could be crucial when there are conflicting points of view between the general membership and a self organised group.

As LGBT+ members we believe in self-organisation. As it says in UNISON's rules, we meet to identify and agree policy on LGBT+ equality and the equality dimension of UNISON priorities and objectives. We do this at our conference and in our branch, regional and national LGBT+ groups. Our group is the democratic representative of LGBT+ members in UNISON.

We get our voice heard through:

- regular meetings with the presidential team and senior members of NEC strategic committees through our membership of the Equality Liaison Committee
- direct LGBT+ references to NEC strategic committees
- seats on national delegations
- membership of working parties and review groups
- submission and representation rights at all UNISON conferences.

It's important to us to represent the diversity of LGBT+ members. Our national networks of bi, Black LGBT+, disabled LGBT+ and trans members are represented on the national LGBT+ committee and submit motions to our annual conference. Women's representation is also guaranteed in our group.

Within LGBT+ self-organisation, LGBT+ members elect the representatives of LGBT+ members – who are then accountable back to the LGBT+ members that elected them.

We supported reserved seats for Black members and young members as this was the only way for them to get ANY representation on the NEC initially. This is not the case for LGBT+ members. A number of LGBT+ members have been elected to the NEC over the years, the figure regularly being over 5% for 'out' members. There have not been any out trans NEC members yet, but trans activists hold a number of other senior activist positions. We work to increase this number and the visibility of LGBT+ members in senior positions across the union. The rainbow lanyards continue to increase!

Claire Andrews

by Hassan Ortega

“They ran me out of Trinidad and Tobago, you know. In those days, it was a massive scandal having an open lesbian in our community... they threw bricks at me in the street.”



With those words my colleague Claire Andrews succinctly told me the circumstances that led her to arriving in the UK in the 1960s. Like many of us who have experienced the trauma of ostracism and hatred, she glossed over those formative years in conversation but as she also said, “You never forget, do you? You have to remember, you can’t be a victim”.

She had firm opinions about where we were going as a movement and what that meant for Black lesbians and gay men. Claire wanted to storm the barricades and she did that - both figuratively and literally. Never one to be in awe of a title or perceived social position, she would march right up to her target and start asking “Hello, what are you doing about...?” and put them on the spot.

She gave a lot of her time and energy within UNISON to ensure that there was space in Black members and (then) Lesbian & Gay members self organisation to debate our issues, and get policies in place which addressed them.

After retirement, she managed to get a place in sheltered accommodation. When I went to visit to check she had settled in, I found her making hot pepper sauce (which she always carried with her).

“So, how do you like it?” I asked.

“It’s full of aspidistras and old people - it needs shaking up - they won’t know what’s hit them!”

Claire Andrews was a remarkable individual who should not be forgotten for her contribution. She made Black LGBT history during her lifetime but she also made a lot of friends.

Welcome to the Organising Space!

UNISON
organising
space

The Organising Space is a secure online resource developed to support all our activist and organising communities. It's there to help us build relationships and share vital knowledge and info about all our activities. It's a space to share helpful information, have discussions, ask experts and seek support, and you can do it all from your smartphone, Tablet or PC. Access is secured by MyUNISON, so you'll log in with a unique user profile under your own name. Staff access can be found through:

To use MyUNISON, you need to register with My UNISON: <https://my.unison.org.uk/>

When you have a password and your membership number you can logon to the SPACE <https://organisingspace.unison.org.uk>

When you first log on to Organising Space the best place to visit is the green “Welcome to the Space” tile. Here you can click on the helpful tips and suggestions on how to get around.

What could I add to the Organising Space?

Think about things like:

- Organising documents
- How-tos
- Useful leaflets
- Reports of actions
- Pictures and videos

Any other resources you've found useful! Whatever has worked in your branches and you'd like to share with others.

Remember: Organising Space is being used by activists who may be working in isolation, so a small leaflet or a word of helpful advice may be really useful.

See you online!

Just asking - is pride relevant?

By Craig Smart

With another pride season over, should we be asking if pride still relevant? Or should it become more political than ever?

There is no denying that the LGBT+ community have made considerable advances in the battle for equality.

In the UK same sex couples can now legally marry, we can adopt, and trans people now have legal gender recognition, but there is still so much more to fight for.

But, Trans people face an archaic system to have their gender identity legally recognised and face attacks on a daily basis, and non-binary and gender non-conforming people still do not have legal gender recognition. Men who sleep with men still cannot donate blood, unless a 3 month period of abstinence or a life of celibacy is taken, LGBT hate crime and discrimination is on the rise, and mass protests have erupted due

to inclusive Sex and Relationship Education.

Of course, the fight for LGBT+ rights isn't just a national issue, it spans the globe! 72, yes, seventy-two (that isn't a typo) countries still criminalise homosexuality and in a dozen LGBT+ people can be sentenced to death simply for being who they are. In this, the Donald Trump era, a recent survey suggests tolerance towards LGBT+ people amongst young people is falling, and we are seeing an erosion of not only acceptance, but as populism grows, potentially our legal rights alongside this.

One entity that has made gains on the LGBT+ community, globally: international sales. As international

corporations stand in solidarity with LGBT+ people, with many pumping thousands of pounds into pride organisations to advertise their inclusivity, be under no illusions, this has allowed LGBT+ pride to gain much more visibility and exposure globally—but is this to our detriment?

It is great that companies are inclusive, after all this is what we've been fighting for, but a few issues I have is just how much influence their money is buying, for example: there are often now strict restrictions on how prides are organised. We know LGBT+ people are disproportionately affected by poverty, insecure employment, and austerity. As a consequence extortionate prices charged to take



part in pride literally prices LGBT+ people out of going to pride, and grass roots organisations are increasingly pushed to the side. Why are we letting a grassroots movement such as Pride, essentially be privatised?

But just how supportive of LGBT+ people are these companies? There are many organisations who sell products to show they support us — usually a rainbow flag and glitter seems to do the trick! But the money generated doesn't always benefit the community. On the flip side, the companies that do actually donate to LGBT+ charities, ever take a stance on how ethical their products are? Are they aware of the impact their supply chain can have?

Let me elaborate: Primark entered into a partnership with ILGA to create products for Pride season across Europe and proceeds from the sales will go to ILGA – “great”, I hear you say, “fantastic”! But hold up, Primark sources its products in Bangladesh, and are now signed

up to a number of Ethical Charters to ensure safe working conditions for garment workers, which was brought to the forefront after the tragic incident in the Rana Plaza, so does this make it ethical? Although unquestionably labour rights in Bangladesh still have a long way to go, they are making gains, but Bangladesh's record on LGBT rights is horrific.

So we have a company, apparently supporting the LGBT+ community, by making a much needed donation to LGBT+ organisation, while sourcing products from LGBT+ phobic countries. Workers, potentially LGBT+ workers, will be making clothes advertising freedom to love who you want and being your true self, while being shackled by the chains of oppression and bigotry.

In a time when LGBT+ rights are taking a backward turn, when hate crime towards us is on the rise, when populist politicians are being elected on a platform of ignorance and bigotry, and a time

when our rights could quite easily be erased while our backs are turned, we need to take a stance. We need to stand up for the Global LGBT+ community in holding these corporations accountable. They must want to prove they are worthy of being at our event, and we can only do that with consumer power.

Many people may feel pride isn't needed to the degree it was needed in the 1960's. I would say it is, now more than ever, but I would say let us bring the Stonewall Riots into the 21st century. Let us innovate, hold them to account, and use social media to challenge them. If their record is questionable, avoid them — but most of all, get everyone who is your ally to do the same, and as a modern movement we can shift the political climate towards LGBT+ people across the globe.

UNISON has produced a branch guide on ethical procurement:
[unison.org.uk/get-help/
knowledge/contracts/
procurement/](http://unison.org.uk/get-help/knowledge/contracts/procurement/)



Knowsley UNISON Branch LGBT+ Self-Organised Group

by Kevin O'Neill

Liverpool Pride 2019 saw a record breaking 12,000 supporters attend this year's celebration, it was an opportunity for the newly organised Knowsley UNISON Branch LGBT+ SOG to march under their banner.

The banner incorporating the new Plus sign within the group name, not only demonstrates the inclusivity of the group, but is a nod to the hard work and campaigning carried out by our colleagues within the North West Region and nationally which culminated in the rule change at NDC in June.

Knowsley Branch saw most of its LGBT+ SOG members attend this year's North West LGBT+ Annual General Meeting, allowing SOG members to network and obtain an overview of the range of work delivered by the UNISON North West LGBT+ Group since September 2018. In addition, allowing SOG members to volunteer

to become more involved in future regional work.

Since its short inception Knowsley Branch LGBT+ SOG has seen membership increase by more than 50%, with some members working within national LGBT+ caucuses. SOG members have also successfully submitted Motion 7 'Ensuring LGBT+ Representation in Apprenticeships', which will be moved at this year's conference in Bournemouth.

Knowsley Branch LGBT+ SOG looks forward to becoming a more established SOG and working collaboratively at branch, regional and national level.



ILGA World

ILGA World, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, is the world federation of over 1600 national and local member organisations dedicated to achieving equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) people across the globe and a key focus for our international work.

All of UNISON's regional LGBT+ groups are members of ILGA, and UNISON is an affiliate member. We work closely with ILGA to promote LGBT+ equality throughout Europe and the world. We highlight and promote many ILGA campaigns including the annual Rainbow index and accompanying maps of the rights of LGBT+ people throughout Europe, Central Asia and the world.

Darienne Flemington has served on the ILGA Europe board for two terms and has served as co-secretary for three years and co-chair for one. In these roles Darienne has consistently highlighted the work that trade unions do towards LGBT+ workers rights throughout the world and brought a distinctly UNISON focus to governance.

At the recent ILGA Europe conference Darienne was re-elected to board for a further two years. **Congratulations Darienne**

Here's why pronouns are so important

Pronouns, also known as “I”, “they”, “she”, “he”, “we”, “hers” and many others, are a part of our daily language. We use pronouns as a way to identify or refer to someone, and pronouns are important because they’re the smallest way to acknowledge someone’s identity. There are lots of articles and discussions on social media as to whether or not pronouns are important, so let’s set the record straight: they definitely are!

They are extremely personal, and using them correctly shows respect for the person we’re talking to — pronouns are a way that we identify with the world, and they move with us throughout our lives.

Most people have the privilege not to worry about others misusing their pronouns. Taking that privilege for granted and failing to use someone’s correct pronoun is not only disrespectful and hurtful, but can also lead to that person feeling alienated.

Respecting people’s pronouns is the vital first step in creating an inclusive environment.

What are Gender Neutral pronouns?

Gender neutral or gender inclusive pronouns are unspecific to

one gender. This is especially important for people who don’t identify with their assigned gender at birth. Rather than assume someone’s pronouns based on their appearance, it’s crucial to ask them what their pronouns are.

An example of gender neutral pronouns is the use of “they”. Instead of saying “he’s going home”, one would say “they’re going home”. “Jesse is in the same team as me, so I’ll work with them”. Here we can see that Jesse is not associated with a particular gender. Jesse’s pronouns are they/them/theirs.

It is important to respect pronouns as it validates a person’s identity, and you shouldn’t assume someone’s pronoun. Remember to ask about pronouns when you meet someone, or introduce yourself using your pronouns to let others know what your pronouns are. Using pronouns creates safer and more inclusive spaces for people to be themselves, knowing that other people are going to respect their identity.

Make respectful pronoun communication a regular habit, it really isn’t anything new, Chaucer and Shakespeare used they as a singular pronoun. Jane Austen used it 75 times in *Pride and Prejudice*.



For more info:

Out in UNISON is only published three times a year, but you can get monthly updates direct to your inbox by signing up for our LGBT+ e-bulletin at unison.org.uk/out

Contact us

For more information about your regional LGBT+ group or to join UNISON please call **0800 0 857 857**.

Minicom **0800 0 967 968**.

Lines open from 6am to midnight, Monday – Friday and 9am to 4pm Saturday

For LGBT+ queries email: out@unison.co.uk

